

16 employers in county boast commuter-friendly workplaces

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Sixteen San Diego County employers were named yesterday to a list of best workplaces for commuters by the San Diego Association of Governments.

The employers were among a list of companies and organizations recognized nationally for offering workers superior commuting benefits.

The program is based on standards developed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and is intended to encourage commuting options. The EPA estimates that congestion created by commuting causes 3.7 billion hours of lost productivity annually and \$63.1 billion in wasted time and fuel.

Heading the list of San Diego employers was Qualcomm, which ranked No. 5 nationally among Fortune 500 companies. Only 133 of the Fortune 500 companies made the list this year.

Among the benefits Qualcomm offers are transit subsidies, bike and motorcycle parking, membership in a car-sharing network, shuttles to trolley and train stations and a 25 percent subsidy for employees who use van or car pools.

"I think the employers are very aware of how commuting affects their employees," said Allison Richards-Evensen, manager of SANDAG's RideLink commuter program. "They know that developing commuting programs can decrease stress on their employees, increase timeliness in reporting to work and reduce the financial impact of long-distance commuting."

Last year, six local employers made the list. In addition to Qualcomm, repeat employers on the list were Becton, Dickinson & Co.; Flexcar Southern California; SANDAG; the San Diego Air Pollution Control District; and Sony Online Entertainment.

Local employers on the list for the first time: Biosite; California Bank & Trust; Catalyst Advancement; the city of San Diego; Daniel Benson & Associates; REMEC Defense & Space; SAIC; TKG Consulting Engineers; the University of San Diego; and Watkins Manufacturing.

To qualify for best workplaces designation, employers must provide several benefits from a list that includes providing commuting information to employees; car pool, bus or train subsidies; cash payments in lieu of free parking; a telecommuting program; car and van pool incentives; showers and lockers for bikers or walkers; and incentives for living near work.

TKG Consulting Engineers in Sorrento Valley started its commuter program six months ago, said Juliet Adams, who handles human resource issues for the company, which employs 73.

"We know that we have a lot of employees who travel long distances to come to work," she said. "We have people who live in Oceanside and Temecula, who can commute up to an hour and a half."

TKG allows flex hours, letting workers start at any time between 6 a.m. and 8:30 a.m. or to work nine-hour days four days a week and four hours on the fifth workday.

It also provides a 50 percent subsidy for workers who take bus, trolley or van pools to work. Employees who carpool are entered into a monthly drawing for a \$50 subsidy.

"We know about traffic and congestion, and we want to do what we can to help our employees deal with it," Adams said.